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ART. XVI.—*A translation of the first book of Ovid's Tristia, in heroic English verse, with the original text. By Francis Arden, Counsellor at Law. New York, 1821.*

WHATEVER may be thought of the merits of this author's poetry, the candor of his preface should certainly secure him from illnatured criticism. The following exposition of the object to which his efforts were principally directed, will materially assist the reader in forming an impartial and thorough judgment of his success.

'The present essay claims to be no more than an experimental effort, in which the translator has so markedly preferred the words and order of his text to less restrained attempts at imitative elegance, that in no instance has he dropped expressive terms of the original, or presumed to vary from its manner, unless the genius of our language, or some metrical obstacle, seemed to require the liberty. He is not conscious, however, of needing much indulgence either for what he has omitted, or may in any way have ventured to change.

'A course so straightened not only diminishes opportunities for ornamental display, but renders the display itself proportionably difficult; the reader is therefore cautioned against anticipations of high poetical beauties, and intreated to rest satisfied with a degree of smoothness in the composition, exceeding, perhaps, what its alleged closeness might have prepared him to expect.

'If it be asked, why this has not been executed in greater conformity to the prevailing style of verse translation? I answer, that an attempt to render a Latin Poem such as it would appear if originally composed in English, seems, to my apprehension, rather calculated to cover the freedoms of its translator, than susceptible of attainment; that my intent was not to exhibit Ovid in the folds of paraphrastic drapery, but to convey what he wrote; and that I was particularly desirous to learn how my manner of executing this intent would be received.

'I will not attempt to deprecate severity of criticism, by enumerating the disadvantages under which my little work was completed, and yet these were perhaps as great as have attended the presentation of any ancient classic in modern language; my best excuse is in the fidelity of the version; and I have only to request, that the critical reader will bear in mind the goal at which I purposed to arrive, and by comparing my lines with the original, ascertain how nearly I have approached it.'

Modest as these promises are, it is a high as well as just praise, to say that they are amply fulfilled. Of all the languages generally studied in this country or in England, the

most difficult to translate with ease and grace, is unquestionably the Latin. It abounds more in inversions and transpositions than the Greek, the French, or the Italian, and its idioms are often so utterly irreconcilable with the genius of our own tongue, that a poetical version of a Roman poet which is highly literal, without being intolerably harsh, is a proof of no inconsiderable command of language and of numbers. That we have not been guilty of extravagant praise, may be easily seen from comparing a few passages of our author's version with the original. As he has rendered this an easy task by printing them side by side, we shall quote only a single paragraph from the conclusion of the eleventh elegy. We do not know how the meaning of an ancient or foreign author can well be rendered more fully and faithfully than in the following lines :

Savage the race to left, intent on prey,  
Whom gore, and war, and slaughter, always sway,  
And though with winter's billows ocean rolls,  
More boisterous than that ocean are their souls.  
These lines then more kind reader should you spare,  
If meaner than your hope, as sure they are,  
I write them not in gardens, as of old,  
Nor you, the custom'd couch, my person hold ;  
On the wild deep I toss, in Brumal hours,  
And the blue water o'er my paper showers ;  
Stern winter strives, incensed that while he throws  
His cruel terrors round, I dare compose.

Barbara pars læva est, avidæ succincta rapinæ,  
Quam cruor, et cædes, bellaque semper habent.  
Cúmque sit hibernis agitatum fluctibus æquor ;  
Pectora sunt ipso turbidiora mari.  
Quo magis his debes ignoscere, candide lector,  
Si spe sunt, ut sunt, inferiora tuâ.  
Non hæc in nostris, ut quandam, scribimus ortis :  
Nec consuete meum, lectule, corpus habes.  
Jactor in indomito brumali luce profundo :  
Ipsaque cæruleis charta feritur aquis.  
Improba pugnat hiems, indignaturque, quòd ausim  
Scribere, se rigidas incutiente minas.

The principal defect of this work, which is, in a word, a want of conciseness and vivacity, may be ascribed partly if not wholly to our author's strict adherence to the plan laid down in his preface. It is evident from the passage which we have cited, that, with him, literal exactness was an object

of primary and almost of exclusive attention ; that he resolved that every expression in the original, should be represented in his version, and that not only virtually but actually. His ideas on this subject differ widely from ours. We cannot but assent to the general opinion, that in translating an ancient classic, it should be our first object to express his meaning as he would have done had the English language been that of his age and country. Could this rule be completely obeyed, no other would be requisite. Since, however, much of the merit of the celebrated writers of Greece and Rome is necessarily lost in every modern version, a translator should be not only allowed but required, to repair as far as possible an injury, which he cannot prevent, by softening the faults or heightening the beauties of the original, to any extent not inconsistent with a general fidelity. To say that he shall expose all his author's defects, especially those which are accidental and not habitual and characteristic, is to require a degree of exactness like that of the Chinese manufacturers, who copy with the nicest care, not only the shape and colour, but even the rents and flaws, of every article of dress or furniture, which is given to them as a pattern.

The liberty of embellishment is now as universally conceded to translators as that of retrenchment, and though it may seem more questionable, rests on similar reasons. There is as much truth as point in the well known remark of DeLille, 'on doit être quelquefois supérieur à son original, précisément parcequ' on lui est très inférieur.'—'Slaves we are and work on another man's soil,' says Dryden of the whole race of translators, and there is no reason why they should be prohibited entirely from making improvements, which redound to the benefit of their masters. Indeed the comparative advantage of servile and of liberal (we do not say licentious) poetical translation, is a question which we consider as fully settled, by the different fortunes of Pope's and of Cowper's *Iliad*. That Cowper has given us an exact image of the original, is indeed a popular maxim, but few would be willing to qualify themselves for judging of its truth, by reading through his version. That of Pope on the contrary, notwithstanding all that has been said of its unfaithfulness, by a long line of minute critics, from his day to ours, is the only medium, through which the beauties of the Grecian bard are known to the generality of English and American readers. Yet though we cannot approve of the

principles of translation, laid down by our author, we think any attempt to render our countrymen better acquainted with the sentiments of the ancient classical poets, highly honorable and useful. Still we should be far from recommending the *Tristia* of Ovid as worthy of particular attention, and think that Mr Arden has honored it much beyond its deserts, by naming it in the same sentence with the *Fasti*. Ovid carried little of his poetry into banishment, except the ease and melody of his versification. His five books of *Tristia* and four of *Epistles* from Pontus, are distinguished by a superabundant share of all the defects of his early writings, and by an almost total absence of his characteristic spirit and ingenuity. They are filled with childish exaggerations of the inclemency of the climate and the inhumanity of the people of Pontus, with servile intreaties to Augustus, and with petulant and unfounded complaints of the neglect of his former friends. We find a perpetual recurrence to the same ideas, a monotonous strain of doleful lamentation, which continually reminds us of the note of the whippoorwill. Not satisfied with the most simple and natural, and therefore most interesting expressions of his grief, he is perpetually striving to excite the sympathy of the reader, not by pathetic declamation, but by logical argument. He does not exclaim with the prophet, 'see if there be any sorrow like to mine,' but sets out to prove the point, by precedents drawn from history and poetry, by close parallels and nice distinctions, between his own adventures and those of some of the fabled heroes of antiquity. His petitions, his compliments, and his reproaches are all disfigured with the same intermixture of frigid reasoning. Let those who think these remarks too unqualified, turn more particularly to the second elegy of the first book of the *Tristia*. This purports to be a prayer to the sea gods, written by the poet in a violent storm, on his voyage to the place of his exile. Instead of a concise and impassioned petition, it is a collection of quibbling sophisms, which, if expressed in plain English prose, might be mistaken for the work of some of those sages of the law whose subtleties are detailed in Plowden's Commentaries. Defects like those which we have mentioned, can be concealed or repaired in no version whatever; and we cannot but think that our author, in attempting to render the *Tristia* interesting in an English dress, has undertaken a task, beyond not only his own power, but that of any poet.